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SUBJECT: WEEKLY MEDIA WRAP-UP: SOMALIA, THE ETHIOPIAN OFFENSIVE;
DEATH SENTENCE FOR SADDAM HUSSEIN; MIDDLE EAST A "WASTED" YEAR; IRAN
CHALLENGES INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. DECEMBER 29, 2006.

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Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia, conducted with alleged "tacit" or "explicit" U.S. support dominated the international news in France this week. The French press denounced the pending execution of Saddam Hussein and complained that he is being put to death before being tried for the Anfal killings of Kurds. Two opinion pieces summarized the situation in the Middle East at the close of 2006 in dailies of record right-of-center Le Figaro and left-of-center Le Monde. Both argued that the standstill in two-state negotiations was due to a "crisis of leadership" in Israel as well as among the Palestinians. On December 26, left-of-center Le Monde quoting Iranian president Ahmadinejad who insisted that "Iran is a nuclear country," concluded that "Teheran is sticking to its guns and will not abandon its nuclear program." End Summary.

SOMALIA, THE ETHIOPIAN OFFENSIVE

¶2. (U) The editorial by Pierre Haski in left-wing Liberation December 26, entitled "The Decline," noted that there were "two ways of analyzing the war that has broken out between Somalia and Ethiopia. One is ideological, with a new front open in the war on terrorism and American support for a Christian Ethiopia to stop the rise of a new Afghanistan [in Somalia], a possible haven for al Qaida and international terrorism... The other is more realistic. Ethiopia, classed 170th out of 177 countries in terms of development by the UN, is waging a war against another country, the state of decline of which makes it irrelevant statistically for the UN... Somalia is emblematic of a failed state... This war will do nothing more than further accentuate the suffering and poverty in Somalia... and points to the failure of the international efforts of the 1990s."

¶3. (U) On December 27 in right-of-center Le Figaro, Arnaud de la Grange called Somalia an "ideal haven for al Qaida." La Grange noted that "Recently a French intelligence source expressed concern over the institutionalized chaos in Somalia... For Washington it is clear that al Qaida is already well-rooted in Somalia... But EU intelligence sources say that the situation is not so clear cut, even if they agree that the threat is very real... In order to carry out the fight against terrorism in the region, the Americans

set up camp in Djibouti after 9/11. But with the exception of a few CIA forays, amateurish at that, Somalia remains marginalized in terms of its threat potential according to Washington; just like Afghanistan after the Cold War."

¶4. (U) Left-of-center Le Monde reported Washington's alleged "tacit" support for Ethiopia's military intervention. "When General Abizaid... was in Addis-Ababa at the beginning of the month, he warned government leaders of the humanitarian consequences of an invasion in Somalia, but did not call for the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops... Was the U.S. wise to choose sides so clearly? Did it not over-evaluate the threat posed by the Islamic tribunals... In any event, many experts are denouncing Washington's support for the Ethiopian regime in the name of the war on terrorism."

¶5. (U) By December 29, the front page of Le Monde was announcing the retreat of the Islamist combatants from Mogadishu and the unsigned editorial noted that "In just one week the Ethiopian army and the Somali government forces have turned the situation around... From the international standpoint, the U.S., which has always supported Ethiopia, sees the defeat of the Somali Islamists as secondary with regard to Afghanistan or Iraq, but nonetheless significant in the war on terrorism... It is too soon to say what lessons can be drawn from the fighting in Somalia, but without a determined international effort, war will become the norm, and peace ephemeral."

DEATH SENTENCE FOR SADDAM HUSSEIN

¶6. (U) Right-of-center Le Figaro's December 27 headline announced that "Saddam Hussein will be executed." Le Figaro reported that "the fallen Iraqi dictator is expected to be hanged within thirty days... His execution will in effect mean that he cannot be tried in person for the military campaign in Anfal in 1987 and 1988 in the northern part of Kurdistan. It was during this raid that a chemical attack on Halabja killed some 5000 people, three quarters of whom

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were women and children... Many members of the Kurdish community, including Iraqi president Jalal Talabani, have said that Saddam Hussein should not be executed before the Anfal trial but the Shiite government, elected during the last round of voting, intends to eliminate Saddam Hussein as quickly as possible in order to establish its power made shaky by the civil war... Saddam Hussein will therefore not be able to explain his actions at the time of the Anfal raid, when Iraq was fighting Iran, spurred on by Europe and the U.S."

¶7. (U) The December 28 unsigned editorial in left-of-center Le Monde claimed that "the sentence has been rejected by the United Nations and all of the Human Rights organizations... History will remember that the toppling, the arrest as well as the trial of the former tyrant and his acolytes were from beginning to end an American affair. Yet there is no doubt that the sentence pronounced by the Iraqi court is a reflection of the desire of a vast majority of the Iraqi people... It is the victors' justice that has won out... and many will bemoan the fact that Saddam Hussein will be hanged for one of his lesser crimes."

MIDDLE EAST -- "A WASTED YEAR"

¶8. (U) On December 28, Pierre Rousselin's editorial in right-of-center Le Figaro lamented that "A little over a year ago, Ariel Sharon was congratulating himself for the successful withdrawal from Gaza and had let it be known that Israel could do the same in the West Bank. The Palestinians, good students of George W. Bush's 'democratization' plans for the Middle East, were on the verge of voting for the first post-Arafat parliament. With the benefit of hindsight over the last twelve months, one can see the distressing state that the Israeli-Palestinian situation is in. Gaza is on the brink of civil war... and Ehoud Olmert, with no coherent policy, is weakened by his failed war against Hezbollah.

In the backdrop, chaos reigns in Iraq, the Lebanese crisis worsens and Iran is rising in power. American diplomacy alone has the means necessary to act and yet appears to have thrown in the towel, leaving the Israelis and the Palestinians in a face-off."

¶9. (U) A December 28 op-ed by Gilles Paris in left-of-center Le Monde discussed the "crisis" of Palestinian leadership. "The death of Yasser Arafat left a void that neither his successor nor his Islamist detractors have been able to fill... Each statement on the part of the Americans in support of Mahmoud Abbas serves to fuel criticism that he is at best Washington's puppet and at worst a collaborator. Indeed this support has no concrete manifestation... and the situation in the Middle East has never been worse... As for Hamas, it is boycotted by the U.S. and the EU, and regarded with circumspection by the major Arab countries that fear the same rise to power of the Islamists in their own countries. Hamas cannot count on those who today appear to be its best allies... they are merely one more card in Iran's game in the Middle East."

IRAN CHALLENGES THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

¶10. (SBU) The December 25 headline in right-of-center Le Figaro stated that "Iran is Defying the UN." Pierre Rousselin's claimed that "Teheran's reaction to the UN Resolution is more significant than the Resolution itself... and this time Iran is not just defying the U.S. or the West, but the entire international community... While the U.S. is rethinking its strategy in Iraq, the regime of the Mullahs feels that it is in a position of force... But Iran must make a fundamental choice. If it decides to bypass the [Non-Proliferation Treaty] it would be making a dire mistake. It would call into question the strategic balance all the way to Europe or Asia. The passing of Resolution 1737 shows that neither Russia nor China, no more so than the West, can accept this."
HOFMANN